

Neotropical birds, like bluebirds, robins, orioles, and goldfinches, travel across international borders and depend upon thousands of miles of suitable habitat. In fact, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, neotropical migratory birds typically spend five months of the year at Caribbean/Latin American wintering sites, four months in North American breeding areas, and three months traveling to these sites during spring and autumn migrations.

Sadly, there are 90 North American bird species that are listed as either threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act and an additional 124 birds that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has identified on its list of Migratory Nongame Birds of Management Concern.

In North America, an estimated 70 percent of prairie birds are declining. The Government of Mexico lists approximately 390 birds species as endangered, threatened, vulnerable, or rare. What is lacking, however, is a strategic plan for bird conservation, money for on-the-ground projects, public awareness, and any real coordination among the various nations where neotropical migratory birds reside.

While the full extent of the problems facing neotropical migratory birds is unclear, there is no debate over the fact that both bird populations and critical habitat declined significantly in the 1990's. We must act now before more of these species become endangered or extinct. This bill will contribute to the recovery and conservation of migratory birds, without violating private property rights.

There are 60 million adult Americans who enjoy watching and feeding birds at their homes. In fact, these activities generate some \$20 billion in economic activity each year. In addition, healthy bird populations are an invaluable asset for farmers and timber interests. By consuming detrimental insects, these birds prevent the loss of millions of dollars each year.

Under the terms of this legislation, an individual or an organization would be able to submit a project proposal to the Secretary of the Interior. While the bill does not limit the type of projects, I would expect that efforts to determine the condition of neotropical migratory bird habitat, implement new or improved conservation plans, undertake population studies, educate the public, and reduce the destruction of essential habitat would be forthcoming. Since these birds migrate between the Caribbean, Latin America, and North America, comprehensive plans must be developed. It does little good if we are successful in conserving suitable habitat in only a portion of their range.

During the previous Congress, I introduced a similar bill to assist neotropical migratory birds. In fact, that bill was the subject of a public hearing on September 17, 1998. At that time, the Administration testified that "H.R. 4517 goes a long way in promoting the effective conservation and management of neotropical migratory birds by supporting conservation programs and providing financial resources. We applaud this important and timely initiative." In addition, representatives from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the National Audubon Society testified in strong support of my legislation.

I am confident that a Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund would provide much-needed support for projects designed to con-

serve critical habitat for declining migratory bird species in an innovative and cost-effective way.

I urge my colleagues to support the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN MEAT LABELING ACT

HON. EARL POMEROY

OF NORTH DAKOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 6, 1999

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to announce my original cosponsorship of the Country of Origin Meat Labeling Act of 1999. I am looking forward to working in a bipartisan manner with my colleague, Representative CHENOWETH of Idaho, on this important legislation for America's ranchers, farmers, and consumers.

The Country of Origin Meat Labeling Act of 1999 is designed to provide American consumers with the right to know where the meat products they are feeding their families are produced. As we all know, American consumers can easily determine which country their automobiles are from and which country their shoes, shirts, and trousers are from, but they have no idea where the meat and meat products they feed their families originate.

Throughout my service in the House of Representatives, I have been a strong supporter of country of origin labeling—especially for meat and meat products—because of its common-sense nature, its benefits to ranchers and consumers, and its cost-free benefit to taxpayers. During the 105th Congress, I joined Representative CHENOWETH as an original cosponsor of H.R. 1371, the Country of Origin Meat Labeling Act of 1997. I was pleased that the Senate adopted an amendment identical to H.R. 1371 by unanimous consent during consideration of the FY 1999 Agriculture Appropriations bill.

Unfortunately, the special interests prevailed during the Agriculture Appropriations Conference Committee and the meat labeling provision was dropped from the report. Instead, Congress directed the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to conduct another study to determine the empirical impacts of country of origin labeling for consumers, packers, and producers. Basically, the study provides the packing industry with yet more time to delay this important, consumer-friendly legislation.

Mr. Speaker, America's livestock industry is in dire straits. Livestock prices are near record lows while at the same time packers' profits are at near record highs. America's ranchers and farmers have invested heavily in genetic research and nutrients to produce the most cost-effective and nutritious products in the world. But, unfortunately, without country of origin labeling, consumers have no idea where the meat products they purchase originate, leaving American cattlemen's efforts for naught.

I look forward to working with my colleagues from both sides of the aisle, the National Farmers Union, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the American Sheep Industry Association, and the National Consumers League in the passage of this important legislation.

HEALTH INSURANCE TAX DEDUCTIBILITY ACT

HON. GENE GREEN

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 6, 1999

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, today I am reintroducing the Health Insurance Tax Deductibility Act of 1998. This bill is the same simple, common sense solution to a very complex and destructive problem in our society.

Since I came to Congress in 1992, we have debated health care reform and considered a wide range of proposals—all designed to insure a greater number of Americans. When President Clinton signed the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) into law in 1996, everyone said Congress had taken the first step towards ensuring access to health insurance to more individuals and families.

Unfortunately, a study completed last year by the General Accounting Office shows us this goal has not been achieved. Although HIPAA did expand access to health insurance, it did nothing to ensure that Americans can afford health insurance. And as the GAO study recognized, affordability has become the major hurdle for the American family to clear.

In the past, Congress has passed initiatives to encourage and assist people to get health insurance. We allow employers who sponsor health insurance for their employees to deduct the employer's share of the premium as a business expense. We allow self employed people to deduct a percentage of the health insurance premium they purchase. Yet we provide no assistance or incentive for individuals whose employers do not provide health insurance.

The Health Insurance Tax Deductibility Act of 1999 will do just this. Under this legislation, individuals will be able to deduct a portion—linked to the deduction for the self insured—of the money they pay for health and long-term care insurance. This proposal will make health insurance more affordable for individuals and their families, which in turn, will give American families greater peace of mind.

TRIBUTE TO REVEREND DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

HON. BENJAMIN A. GILMAN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 6, 1999

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to honor the legacy of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose birthday we will be commemorating later this month. It is now over 30 years that his life was senselessly snuffed out by an assassin in Memphis, TN.

Following his death, I joined my colleagues in calling for the establishment of the third Monday in January to be a national holiday in honor of Rev. King. While this holiday is not ingrained in the American fabric of life, many of us are bittersweet regarding the message the holiday conveys. Too many Americans view Martin Luther King day as a holiday just for black people. Rev. King himself would be the first person to repudiate that attitude, for his message was for all people, of all races,